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Navajo President Shelly Says Job Cuts are Rumors

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly urges divisions and departments need to be creative with their budgets to ensure that service levels remain intact for the upcoming fiscal year.

“I have heard a lot of people saying that we are going to cut a lot of jobs. These are rumors right now, and we need to focus on cutting wasteful spending in our government. We need to find ways to get the same work done from a smaller budget,” President Shelly said.

President Shelly has been notifying divisions and programs to prepare for budget cuts as large as 10 percent.

“They are making cuts at the Washington levels, and that trickles down to the Navajo Nation. We must keep our service levels the same,” President Shelly added.

One division understood the potential budget cuts and took action to streamline the division’s structure, while maintaining service levels to the people they serve.

The Navajo Nation Division of Social Services recently started rolling out to a restructuring plan that puts a focus to delivering services to the people in local areas, while creating a uniformed reporting system.

“The federal funding is being cut and we need to look at innovative ways to keep our funding,” said Sharon Begaye-McCabe, Navajo Nation Social Services director.

Director Begaye-McCabe said the division actively started restructure from February 2012 after the Alchini Bi beehaz’annii Act, Vulnerable Adult Protection Act, and Violence Against Family Act were passed. Some of the larger aspects of the restructuring included creating a Department of Family Services, centralizing only the administrative duties, and enhancing the processes to deliver uniformed services to the Navajo families.

She added before the restructuring plan, different regional offices had different standards for service delivery. For example, Fort Defiance social workers had a 500 mile limit per month, and once they reached their mileage limit, they couldn't drive to clients.

"That was the only region doing that," she said.

The Division of Social Services must do more for the families, children and elders at a professional level and be more visible at the local communities, which mean social workers do social work in the field. This resulted in the Department of Family Services headed by a licensed social worker, she added.

At the administrative level that accounting system and information technology are being consolidated which could establish standards, reduce the number of audits and allow the program to seek additional grants to help the Navajo families.

"We are standardizing the accounting system for Department of Family Services. We have money reverted back the federal government every year because we don't have a uniform accounting system in place that would ensure that funds are spend for its purpose and not reverted back," Director Begaye-McCabe said.

She said the changes will allows for \$1.7 million more funds to be used to focus on client needs and direct services at the local level.

"That's how much we were spending on five administrative offices when it was under the previous plan of operation. And with the use of business mapping, we might be able to save even more," Director Begaye-McCabe said.

But the changes have met opposition, and Council Delegate Walter Phelps has said he would sponsor legislation to remove the updated plan of operation that created the \$1.7 million savings.

"That would just cause more chaos," Director Begaye-McCabe said, adding that the majority of the about 750 division employees, including the social workers, who earned their bachelor and master degrees, have consented to the new change.

President Shelly said he supports the changes that Director Begaye-McCabe has made in the Division of Social Services.

"Sharon has done a good job making changes. We are saving money, making changes and keeping existing jobs. This is the innovation I am talking about. Think outside the box, reorganize and we will make this government better for our People, President Shelly said.

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